



Highcliffe and Bransgore Methodist Churches

Sunday 7th March 2021 Third Sunday of Lent
Caroline Churcher: "Encounters with Jesus – The Religious Leader" John 3: 1-21.

Lent is the season in which we focus our eyes and hearts explicitly on the cross of Christ. Our self-sacrifices serve no purpose unless, by laying aside our desires, we are able to fulfil our heart's deepest longing, for our lives to be in unity with His. In these weeks leading to Jerusalem, the crucifixion and the joyous fulfilment of resurrection we continue to use John's gospel to meet those who He met, people whose lives were changed forever by their encounter with Him – this week it is Nicodemus, representing the religious leaders.

Opening words: Though separated in person, we come together in love to worship and praise God. Let us be open to His Word through the Holy Spirit and receive his love and grace through Jesus Christ. **Amen**

'Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?" Ezekiel 34:2.

'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' Mark 10:45.

Opening Song Who is there like you? SoF1117

Sing/read/pray/proclaim words.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnoQ3K4pk5Q&ab_channel=ChristChurchSwanley

Who is there like You?
And who else would give their life for me?
Even suffering in my place
And who could repay You?
All of creation looks to You
And You provide for all You have made.



So I'm lifting up my hands
Lifting up my voice
Lifting up Your name
And in Your grace I rest
For Your love has come to me and set me free
And I'm trusting in Your word
Trusting in Your cross
Trusting in Your blood and all Your faithfulness
For Your power at work in me is changing me.

Repeat

Paul Oakley

Collect for the Third Sunday of Lent:

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first
he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was
crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of
the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and
peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and
for ever. **Amen** Church of England Common Worship

Opening Prayer:

Loving Father, you created us to be your children and to spend time with you. In the beginning we were together in the garden, where we could walk and fellowship with you. But because of our pride and disobedience we lost the intimacy that was meant to be the core of our relationship.

However, you never left us. Your purpose was always to bring us back to a full relationship where love and intimacy with you would be fully restored, this is our repentance. When you called together a people for your name, you showed them that until your perfect will was restored, they should be a people with worship at their heart.

Today, during this season of Lent, we dedicate this time to be in your presence, to give and receive, to seek your will and to have our lives shaped to your will and purpose.

Lord, may our worship today be pleasing in your sight, use the words spoken, sung, read and declared, as well as the silences, to be doors and windows to all you would have us learn and know of you and your will for us. **Amen** Based on a prayer from Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust (LWPT)

Prayer of Confession:

Heavenly Father, when you created each one of us, we were meant to be people for your name, made in your image, to proclaim your love and mercy through all we are and do. Forgive us Father, that we have fallen so short of your will for us that we are often the reason others struggle to believe in you, the loving God of the Bible.

Father, forgive us and restore your image and purpose in us.

Father, you made us to be your children, to be your family; but we, like the Prodigal Son, have taken your gifts and gone our own way. We have lost our desire to love and spend time in your presence. We have exchanged the life-giving

power of your loving presence for the world's transient pleasures.

Enthuse us, once again, with desire to spend all our time in your presence.

Father, forgive us, and restore your image and purpose in us.

Lord, you created us to be brothers and sisters to each other, to recognise each other's needs and to love each other as you loved us. Instead, so often we are content to walk by on the other side while others are in need. Poverty, loneliness, violence, and dishonesty are weeds that should never grow in the garden of the Christian life. Lord, forgive us when we sow them or are unprepared to remove them from our lives, churches and nations.

Father, forgive us, and restore your image and purpose in us.

Father, forgive us and cleanse us from all that separates us from you or prevents us from proclaiming your glory and working for your kingdom here on earth. **Amen** LWPT.

In a time of silence we bring our own failings, things that we ask forgiveness for, areas of our lives that we resolve, with Your help, to make right. Listen to hear what God may be saying to you.

Jesus, speaking to Simon the Pharisee about the woman who anointed his feet with tears and perfume, "Her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven." Jesus, speaking directly to her and to us today, "Your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you; go in peace." **Amen** Luke 7:36-50.

Song: Rescuer (Good News)

Sing/read /pray/ proclaim the words.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAg7rn7fH3Q&ab_channel=RendCollective

There is good news for the captive
Good news for the shamed
There is good news for the one who walked away
There is good news for the doubter
The one religion failed
For the Good Lord has come to seek and save.

*He's our rescuer
He's our rescuer
We are free from sin forevermore
Oh how sweet the sound
Oh how grace abounds
We will praise the Lord our rescuer.*

He is beauty for the blind man
Riches for the poor
He is friendship for the one the world ignores
He is pasture for the weary
Rest for those who strive
Oh, the Good Lord is the way, the truth, the life
Yes the Good Lord is the way, the truth, the life.

*He's our rescuer
He's our rescuer
We are free from sin forevermore
Oh how sweet the sound
Oh how grace abounds
We will praise the Lord our rescuer.*

So come and be chainless
Come and be fearless
Come to the foot of Calvary
There is redemption
For every affliction
Here at the foot of Calvary.

Gilkeson Gareth Andrew / Fowler Bryan Christopher, Rend Collective.

Our Lord's Prayer (the Christian family prayer):

Our Father in Heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Yours is the Kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. **Amen.**

Prayer: Loving Lord God, as we read Your Holy Word and the accompanying notes, we pray today that our hearts and minds will be fully open to hear what You are saying to us. May Your

Word always be revelation to us, filled with truth and fresh insight. **Amen**

Scripture Reading: John 3: 1-21

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.'

³ Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

⁴ 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'

⁵ Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'

⁹ 'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ 'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.'

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the

world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. New International Version UK edition

A time to pause, read again, pray, and reflect.

Quotations concerning this passage:

"This conversation between Christ and Nicodemus, which begins with these verses, is one of the most important passages in the whole Bible. Nowhere else do we find stronger statements about those two mighty subjects, the new birth, and salvation by faith in the Son of God." J. C. Ryle

"So many people have this thing confused! They are seeking reformation. Reformation will put new clothes on a man, but regeneration will put a New Man in his clothes! What the world needs, what you need, and what I need is regeneration!" Alan Carr

"In one sentence, Jesus sweeps away all that Nicodemus stood for, and demands that he be re-made by the power of God." Leon Morris

"In Nicodemus we see what culture, religious education, and moral training can do. But man in sin is still man in sin, a prey to the fallen instincts of sin which, given the appropriate time, place, circumstance, and opportunity, will override the veneer with which religion, culture, education, and moral conscience overlay the old." Phillips

"Our search for truth is hindered by the darkness of the night, until the Bright and morning Star Reveals His brilliant light." Sper.

Preaching Notes: *these notes are a supplement to the weekly video which can be viewed on our YouTube channel.*

This passage contains probably the most famous of Jesus's sayings:

John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

It is fundamental to our faith.

Nicodemus seeks understanding of not only who Jesus is, but also what he represents – salvation through the love of God.

"For God so loved the world."

Let's narrow that down. When I was working for a corporate company in the 70s, I was a Team Leader of an accounting group. Every year we had 17-year-old students come to us on work experience. One year, Debbie came to be with us. She was diligent, intelligent, a good team worker. She was also a Christian. There were eight of us in the team, none of whom were Christian including myself. Debbie did not ram her faith down our throats but quietly lived up to her faith through her brief relationship with us. When she left, she gave me a gift. I thought it was a bit odd but thanked her and took the gift home where I put it in a drawer and there it stayed unused for a number of years. Fast forward to the late 90s. How I then became a Christian is for another time, but for the purposes of today, I took from the drawer the gift she gave me. It was the NIV Bible. For the first time in many years I read the inscription on the inside cover which Debbie had written. It said:

"For God so loved Caroline Churcher that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. He is a Pharisee, and the Pharisees are not exactly on good terms with Jesus. So, he comes under cover, as it were, unseen. This is a one-to-one encounter, even the disciples aren't there. This is

just Jesus and Nicodemus together. A very personal meeting.

This morning I want to talk about the personal nature of encountering Jesus. He is very specific in this passage. There is no crowd to preach to, no miracle to perform, just a straightforward conversation where Nicodemus is the only recipient of his teaching. And what a mind-blowing encounter it is. Jesus is telling Nicodemus he must be reborn in water and the Spirit, a direct reference to his own baptism. He is talking of himself as the Son of Man, he is saying that he has been sent from God to save the world from death. The condemnation that awaits all who do not believe in him and the final verdict: the light has come to overcome the darkness.

We are not told Nicodemus's reaction to these statements. Maybe he was stunned into silence. Here is Jesus making it very clear what everyone who wants to be part of the Kingdom should do. God's done his bit. He loves us so much he is willing to sacrifice himself on the cross on our behalf. Our darkness is of our own making. Like a vortex we were sucked into the downward spiral of evil. Here Jesus speaks to each of us about our own darkness. In bringing Jesus into our lives, we bring the light that he gives us.

What might our reaction be? Jesus cannot work without our response. It would have been absolutely no point in coming into the world, sent by God to save the world if the world did not respond. And here, he tells us exactly what our response should be. Being reborn in the Spirit means renewal. Each morning when we wake up we are renewed in God's love. Formal Baptism in water and the Spirit usually comes only once in our lives, but we revive it on a daily basis. We wash to clean our flesh, the earthly part of us. There is symbolism in this as well. Water 'washes away our sins' not just the dirt on our skin. We feel refreshed. We pray to cleanse our spirit, to meet with Jesus personally. Our renewal of our relationship with Jesus is also refreshed. The earthly light of day renews our eagerness to do things, the spiritual light enables us to discover

God's truth and enables us to do his will. Our sins, our separation from God, our darkness are washed away in confession and forgiveness. Being reborn in Christ is a recurrence, a re-encounter each day.

It took a good 10 years or more for me to uncover the light that was already shining in the drawer. The Light of the World stepped into my darkness way ahead of me becoming a Christian and being baptised in water and the spirit.

Nicodemus came at night. Tonight, ask Jesus to be with you. Just you and him. In your prayers, leave room for him to speak to you. Think how you might respond to his calling. And as you pray, think about John 3:16 and insert your own name. See what a difference it makes. **Amen** Written by Local Preacher Caroline Churcher.

Prayers of Intercession:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything; tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4: 6,7 TLB.

We pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. During this season of Lent we especially consider and remember the sacrifice and suffering of our Lord who gave Himself, His very life, for the restoration of our relationship to God. We give thanks for the strong witness of those in countries like Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Iran, North Korea and China where to be a Christian is to be an enemy of the state. We recall that since the birth of Jesus it has been such. Lord, give them strength and courage to stand firm and may our prayers be sustaining for them.

We pray for those organisations like Open Doors and Barnabas Fund who highlight these terrible injustices inflicted upon the innocent.

Loving Father we pray protection for the innocent victims of conflict. Places like Yemen where war

continues to wage between the government and rebels, we pray for a peaceful resolution. We pray that the food and medical aid reaches those who need it. Be with the children who long for an education.

We pray for the children and teachers returning to our schools on Monday. Lord for all of the additional measures, the mask wearing for the older children and the testing that is being undertaken, we ask that You be a calm and secure presence in the midst of anxiety.

Lord, give wisdom, gentleness and patience to our fellowships as we discuss plans to re-open our buildings and consider the form and structure of our worship. May we seek Your will in all that we do, listening to Your voice as to what should resume and what should not. We pray for Your leading on new things, give courage for the making of difficult decisions. We bring our Methodist circuit to You Lord and pray for good relating and good decisions to be made on Thursday as it meets for the first time in almost 18 months and elects new circuit stewards.

We pray for our families; sons, daughters, mothers, fathers and grandchildren, that each one of them who does not know You Lord will meet You. We pray for a personal encounter with Jesus that will change their lives and bring them into a relationship with You. For those who attend our functions or meetings but are unsure if they really know You, give them a new insight and certainty of Your presence and just like Nicodemus, who was so sure of himself until he met Jesus, open their eyes to Your new birth and give Your Holy Spirit to be active in their lives.

Lord, for the lost, the lonely, the sick and the bereaved we pray for Your loving arms to support them. For those who are struggling with addictions, anger, pride or unforgiveness, help them Lord to lay down these things -forever.

We pray for all of the organisations in Highcliffe, Bransgore and beyond who support the vulnerable. In Jesus name we pray. **Amen**

Phillip Dixon

Closing Song: Amazing Grace StF 440

Sing/read or proclaim the words.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03lhwwx>

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come:

'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease:

I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
the sun forbear to shine;

but God, who called me here below,
will be forever mine. John Newton (1725-1807)

Benediction: As Nicodemus left the presence of Jesus with his preconceived religious ideas turned upside down, may we, who seek a closer relationship with God through Jesus, understand the truth of new birth. The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

You are always welcome to contact me 01425 673350 or phillip.dixon@methodist.org.uk

Thank you to Caroline Churcher for this week's service Next week our preacher is Diana Middleditch.

YouTube links are external resources and are provided to help you engage with the songs. Singing the Faith and Hymns and Psalms resources are provided under license: CCLI 178182.